



REPORT ON THE 2008 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

To the citizens of the 16th Legislative District

STATE REPRESENTATIVE MAUREEN WALSH

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Early Learning and Children's Services
Human Services

Task forces and councils:

Children's Trust of Washington
Joint Task Force on Administration
and Delivery of Services to Children
and Families
Caring for Washington Individuals
with Autism Task Force



Dear friends and neighbors,

The Legislature adjourned March 13 after an intense 60-day session. The House and Senate passed more than 300 pieces of legislation and considered hundreds more. It's nice to be home with all of you again.

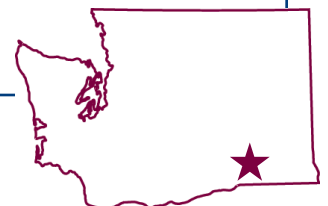
We had several successes this year in Olympia. One bill would give a tax exemption to a polysilicon manufacturer that has Walla Walla on the short list for the location of a new plant. Another bill would put children's needs first in difficult parental rights situations. I'm especially proud of legislation that passed which would provide improvements to the family court system.

For the remainder of the year I'll be continuing my involvement on the Autism Task Force and the Council on Children and Families.

It is an honor to serve you. Please feel free to contact my office anytime and share your comments, concerns or questions. My legislative assistant, Marge, and I strive to respond to each constituent who contacts us.

Sincerely,

Maureen Walsh



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HEALTH CARE

Health care is a hot topic in Washington, and throughout the country. There is no denying that costs are exceeding families' income. Monthly premiums continue to climb, as do out-of-pocket expenses. Some have suggested that our state and country adopt universal health care run by the government. It's a popular idea, but would it really work to reduce costs for individuals, families and businesses? In eight years in this state, we have seen almost 200 bills relating to health care pass through the Legislature. In that same time though, monthly family plans have nearly tripled in cost. Washington state has one of the highest number of mandates on health care – 52, while Oregon and Idaho's mandates are half or less than that.



In a way, it seems we already have government-run health care. The government tells insurance companies what they are required to offer in a health-care plan, increasing the costs for everyone else. Not every individual or family needs or can afford large, luxury plans. Some simply need their occasional doctor visits and prescriptions covered. The most important thing is catastrophic coverage. If you or a loved one is diagnosed with cancer or must go through life-saving surgery, you shouldn't be in the position of having to sell your house or cash out your life savings.

I believe you deserve more options, such as taking your health insurance plan with you as you change jobs, or more plans that meet your specific needs. What if you could use a health insurance company not in Washington? We know that competition drives costs down, and this would also increase your access and options.

You should control your health care – not insurance companies or your employer. Everyone should have access to medical coverage, and I believe if the government, the private sector and citizens work together, we can end this crisis.



FAMILY COURT IMPROVEMENTS

I was so pleased that the bill I co-sponsored to improve our family courts passed the Legislature this year. Families and children who enter the courts need a trained and prepared judicial system to help them work through some tough times in their lives. The goal of this legislation is to increase the quality and consistency of our court system for some of the state's most sensitive cases.

Signed into law at the end of March, House Bill 2822 will allow local courts to apply for grants that can be used for training, facilities, increasing staff and other improvements. Courts will be required to commit one judicial team to a family or juvenile case and improve case management, among other criteria. This helps judges do their jobs better, but also gives each court the option to create their own plan based on what works best for their community.



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LONG-TERM WELL BEING OF CHILDREN

One bill I co-sponsored deals with the care of our children in the foster-care system. House Bill 3205 terminates parental rights in most cases if a child has been in foster care for 15 of 22 months – putting more responsibility on parents to comply with corrective measures and do right by their children. Parents will be provided with the services needed to get themselves together and they must comply in a reasonable amount of time.

I'm pleased to report the bill passed the Legislature and was signed by the governor into law.

For many years I have watched as parents have refused to take the issue of losing their parental rights seriously. It's not fair for children to have their lives hang in the balance because of their parents' inaction.



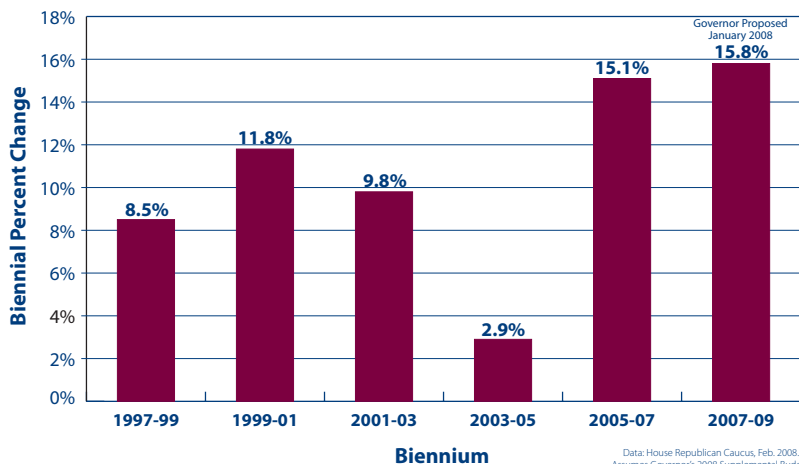
TAXES AND SPENDING

I voted "no" on the supplemental operating budget, because I believe it spends too much in a time when we need to be saving more. I wish we could have finished the session by putting more money in reserves.

In the last four years, the state has increased spending 33 percent and added 6,000 state employees at an enormous cost to taxpayers.

For our next budget cycle, we're expecting to bring in less than we originally thought, so continuing to spend is irresponsible. Every dollar the state has come from a taxpayer, and increasing taxes is unacceptable when we could have avoided problems by not spending so much.

State expenditures of the near general fund show the largest increase in state spending in 10 years



Rep. Walsh is congratulated by House colleagues in her recent leadership appointment as assistant Republican floor leader.

POLYSILICON PLANT

A polysilicon manufacturer has Walla Walla on the short list of potential sites, along with Iceland, Canada and Alabama.

A polysilicon plant would create about 1,000 construction jobs to build the plant, and 300 permanent, good-paying professional jobs. The plant would produce a substance that is used to create solar panels, which are currently being made in Moses Lake. This would obviously be a great thing for Walla Walla and the rest of the state.

To lure the manufacturer to settle down in our area,



Rep. Grant and I sponsored House Bill 3303 that would create a tax incentive for the manufacturer if they show initiative in choosing Walla Walla. I'm proud to say that the bill passed the

Legislature unanimously. The governor signed the bill into law at the end of March. I'll keep you updated on the status of the site for the plant.

TRUST FUNDS FOR DD INSTITUTIONS

I supported legislation that would make more resources available to the developmentally disabled (DD) community. Right now, proceeds from the lease of extra property from two of the state's five residential habilitation centers (RHCs) go back to the DD community.



Under House Bill 6760, the proceeds from the rental of the three remaining properties will be deposited into a developmental disabilities community trust fund account. The lease payments may also be spent on community-based services for people with developmental disabilities. I'm glad that we're opening up more resources for the DD community, especially in a time where our state budget is so tight.

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RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET

If you need information about state government, you may find the following Internet sites to be great resources. Or, you can always call or e-mail my office.

houstorepublicans.wa.gov/walsh – offers my biography and views on various issues.

access.wa.gov – provides access to state agency services, including applying for unemployment benefits, renewing car tabs, and much more.

leg.wa.gov – offers committee meeting schedules and nearly everything else you'd want to know about the Legislature.

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